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ABSTRACT

Life goals and commitment are integral to developmental processes and satisfactions in adulthood and aging. Yet the maintenance and pursuit of appropriate goals and commitments during the aging years may pose particular challenges for the individual within the social context of normal aging. This study examined goals, activity participation, and well-being in aging, using data from 293 women in Terman's Study of the Gifted. Subjects responded to a 1982 questionnaire when they were between the ages of 65 and 75, and had also responded to a questionnaire 10 years earlier. Responses to the 1972 survey classified subjects as homemakers, career workers, or job holders. In 1982, subjects responded to questions about life goals, activities, health, and psychological well-being. The results indicated that the career women in the sample were advantaged relative to the homemakers and income workers in regard to their levels of life goals and activity participation. Career women maintained more ambition about excellence in work, even when retired, and reported a significantly higher level of psychological well-being and a marginal tendency to report better health than other subjects. These findings suggest that women's participation in higher level jobs is psychologically beneficial to them, and that, for intellectually able women, the benefits of career pursuits may persist after the formal pursuit of careers has ended. (NB)

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The Relationship of Lifetime Achievement Patterns to Life Goals, Activity Participation, Health, and Well-Being Among Gifted Aged Women

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Paper presented at the Meetings of the Gerontological Society of America, November 20, 1988, San Francisco, California.

Life goals and commitments are integral to developmental processes and satisfactions in adulthood and aging. Changes in goals and commitments accompany movement through developmental stages (Erikson, 1959) as well as common life cycle transitions (Lowenthal et al., 1975). Moreover, goals and commitments are important for mental health (Klinger, 1977; Wrubel, Benner, & Lazarus, 1981; Erickson, Post, & Paige, 1975). Yet, the maintenance and pursuit of appropriate goals and commitments during the aging years may pose particular challenges for the individual within the social context of normal aging.

The older person's ability to maintain appropriate goals and commitments may have implications for participation and performance in activities and for the relationship of such participation to satisfaction in aging. In addition to their direct relationship to well-being, goals may relate to well-being indirectly through their influence on task performance (Locke, Shaw, Saari, and Latham, 1981). Moreover, participation in meaningful activities has been shown to make a positive contribution to morale (Gubrium, 1973; Palmore, 1970).

In a recent study of life goals in aging among the Terman men and women (Holahan, 1987), goals involving autonomy, involvement, and achievement motivation contributed to the prediction of health and well-being at age 70. Moreover, path analyses demonstrated both a direct and indirect contribution, through activity participation, of life goals to health and well-being.

The Present Study

Despite the significant increase in women's participation in the labor force in recent years, the implications of various work

histories for women's adjustment in aging are not well understood. The women in Terman's Study of the Gifted, begun in 1922, present a unique opportunity for the study of this issue. The women participants have represented a variety of lifestyles and orientations, with over 40% reporting their lifetime career history to be that of a homemaker, and a significant number pursuing careers. The variation in lifestyles in this sample makes it possible to study the relationship of career history to adjustment in aging, while holding ability constant. Previous studies of the Terman women in aging (Sears & Barbee, 1977; Holahan, 1981) have suggested differential effects of lifetime career history on patterns of activity participation and satisfaction.

The present study extends the previous study (Holahan, 1987) of goals, activity participation, and well-being in aging with the Terman subjects by investigating differences among women subjects in the Terman study who vary by lifetime achievement pattern. It was expected that the more complex lifestyles of the women who had pursued careers would be advantageous in aging.

Method

Subjects

The present study is based on the responses of the 293 women respondents to a 1982 questionnaire who were between the ages of 65 and 75 in 1982 ($M = 70.0$, $SD = 2.54$), who also responded to a 1972 survey.

Lifetime achievement pattern. The dominant lifetime career pattern for each respondent was obtained from an item in the 1972 survey. Subjects were classified into three groups on the basis

of their responses to this item: homemakers (N = 129), career workers (N = 118), and job holders (N = 46).

Measures

Life goals. In the 1982 questionnaire, subjects were asked to respond to a list of goals or purposes for their life. Thirteen items were used to construct four goals scales: Autonomy (= .48), Involvement (= .54), Achievement Motivation (= .62), and Family Orientation (r = .28 between the two items).

Activities. In the 1982 questionnaire respondents were asked to indicate their participation in a list of activities. Thirteen activities items were used to construct a measure of total activity participation (= .63). Three subscales were also constructed: General Activities (= .41), Social Group Activities (= .56), and Intellectual Activities (= .48).

Health. Respondents' health was measured on two items in the 1982 questionnaire. The first item asked individuals about their general health since 1976. A second item asked individuals to rate their energy and vitality at this period of life. The responses to these two items were standardized and then summed to form a Health score. The correlation between the 2 items was .71.

Psychological Well-being. Respondents' psychological well-being was assessed by three items in the 1982 questionnaire. The first item asked individuals to indicate their level of happiness. Respondents were also asked to indicate the high end of their mood range on two items measuring anxiety and depression. The responses to these three items were standardized and summed to form the measure of Psychological Well-being used in the present study (= .73).

Results and Discussion

To examine the overall differences in life goals, activity participation, and health and well-being among the Terman women according to lifetime achievement pattern, a Multivariate Analysis of Variance (MANOVA) was conducted with lifetime achievement pattern (homemaker, career worker, or job holder) as the independent variable and life goals, activity participation, and health and well-being as dependent variables. This analysis was significant, $F(14,534) = 4.60$, $p < .001$. Univariate F-tests (ANOVAs) were also conducted to examine each of the dependent variables reported (see Table 1). The results showed that the career workers were the highest on Autonomy, Involvement, and Avhievement Motivation, with homemakers lowest and job holders at intermediate values. Consistent with marital patterns, career workers were lowest on Family Orientation. The career workers showed the highest participation in total activities, in comparison to both the homemakers and job holders. Follow-up analyses on the separate activities scales showed that this finding was due to higher participation by career workers in social group activities (relative to both homemakers and job holders) and in intellectual activities (relative to homemakers). Career workers also were higher than both homemakers and income workers on the measures of health (marginal trend of .11) and psychological well-being.

Overall, the career women in this sample are advantaged relative to the homemakers and income workers in regard to their levels of life goals and activity participation. The results of the present study in regard to achievement motivation reinforce previous results for the Terman women in aging (Holahan, 1981), showing that career workers

maintained more ambition about excellence in work, even when retired. In addition, the results suggest that career participation may entail opportunities for social ties and intellectual stimulation that can be maintained later in life.

It is also noteworthy that the career women in this sample reported a significantly higher level of psychological well-being and a marginal tendency to report better health. These results reinforce a growing body of literature suggesting that women's participation in higher level jobs is psychologically beneficial to them (Baruch, Biener, & Barnett, 1987; Holahan & Gilbert, 1979). Furthermore, the results of this study suggest that for intellectually able women, the benefits of career pursuit may persist after the formal pursuit of careers has ended. Moreover, as more married women enter careers, the benefits of family ties will also be available to them in aging. In planning for their aging years, women need to take into account the potential effects of lifetime work patterns on their psychological, as well as economic, well-being.

Further research will be needed to generalize these findings to a broader population of aging women. Moreover, a focus on adulthood goals would bring to the study of the psychology of aging a broader contemporary emphasis on the self-directedness of human behavior (e.g., de Charms, 1968; Deci, 1980). Such goal-related research would seem to provide a basis for positive interventions for improving the lives of women in aging.

WOMEN'S ISSUES **WORK BEFORE RETIREMENT** **POSTRETIREMENT ACTIVITY**

WELL-BEING **GOALS**

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Footnotes

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Table 1

Means, standard deviations, and results of univariate F-tests for women by lifetime career pattern on goals, activities, health, and psychological well-being.

	Homemakers (N = 129)		Career Workers (N = 118)		Job Holders (N = 46)			
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	F	p
Autonomy	3.78	1.59	4.49	1.31	4.00	1.41	7.45	.01
Involvement	2.96	1.72	3.50	1.53	3.07	1.64	3.54	.05
Achievement Motivation	1.97	1.87	2.72	1.83	2.46	1.85	5.16	.01
Family Orientation	1.74	1.15	1.10	1.15	1.41	1.33	8.94	.001
Total Activities	10.32	4.10	11.95	4.18	10.41	3.77	5.49	.01
General Activities	5.75	2.24	6.17	2.27	5.65	2.08	1.43	.24
Social Group Activities	3.20	2.27	4.10	2.09	2.83	1.92	8.17	.001
Intellectual Activities	1.99	1.52	2.47	1.54	2.74	1.68	5.08	.01
Health	-.46	2.03	.09	2.08	-.32	2.06	2.25	.11
Psychological Well-Being	-.66	2.52	.37	2.20	-.72	2.57	6.50	.01